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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effects of several structural and individual variables on the perceived role of the media by media representatives and the general public. The focus of the study was on public perceptions of the media as "watchdog," but the images of the media as "guide dog," "rabid dog," "lap dog" and "guard dog" were included. Subjects, 567 residents of Dane County, Wisconsin in 1986 and 480 residents of the same county in 1987, were surveyed by telephone to determine their normative concerns about the role of the media and to assess the evaluative judgments of the media's performance. Results indicated that: (1) community structure was significantly related to the "normative watchdog" scale; (2) socioeconomic variables were related to positive evaluations of the media's "watchdog" performance; and (3) respondents in high socio-economic status groups were more critical of certain aspects of the media's performance, but they are more positive toward the system, including the role played by the media. (Four tables of data are included; and 6 appendixes containing additional data tables as well as 28 references are attached.) (RS)

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WATCHING THE WATCHDOG: ANTECEDENTS OF MEDIA PERCEPTIONS

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WATCHING THE WATCHDOG: ANTECEDENTS OF MEDIA PERCEPTIONS

Abstract

This paper is a distillation of one part of a dissertation which analyzes the effects of several structural and individual variables on the perceived role of the media by media representative and the general public. The focus of this paper is on public perceptions of the media as a "watchdog." The point of departure is a set of five stereotypes of the media which has been culled from both academic and popular sources (canine labels are used as shorthand for these stereotypes). The "Watchdog" is one of these images. The discriminating dimension of these stereotypes is their alternative characterizations of the relationship between the media and the social power structure. Using these ideal types as a contextual background, this paper analyzes data from two surveys of residents of Dane County, Wisconsin from 1986 and 1987. Various factors are sought to explain variation in the responses including the structure of the community, socio-economic variables, and the political orientations of the respondent.

WATCHING THE WATCHDOG: ANTECEDENTS OF MEDIA PERCEPTIONS

Public images of the media set expectations for media performance which guide news workers in producing and distributing information. The operation of mass media organizations is influenced by public expectations about what role the media should play in society. If there is a general attitude that the media should rigorously supervise positions of power, then the media are likely to invest more resources monitoring government activities than if the social consensus favors a relatively docile press.

In addition to normative images of the mass media, members of the general public hold evaluative images about the way the media actually perform. Evaluative images of the media affect how information is interpreted by the general public. For example, if an individual believes that the media guard against government corruption, then news coverage of a government scandal might be seen as keeping the government in line with the public interest. However, if the media are seen as tools of the government, then news coverage of a scandal might be interpreted as damage control. This paper analyzes the effects of structural and individual variables on individual's normative and evaluative images of mass media's "watchdog" role.

CANINE ANALOGIES FOR THE MASS MEDIA

Two characteristics which distinguish images of the media are: 1) whether they see the media contribution to society as

being largely functional or dysfunctional; and 2) how they envision the relationship between the media and the power structure of society. Based on these two dimensions, common images of the media can be classified into five categories which will be represented by "canine" analogies.

This analysis focuses on the "watchdog" image, which sees the media as providing a check on government and contributing to the "free marketplace of ideas." The media are seen as being independent of other powerful institutions in society. In other words, the "Watchdog" media are seen as providing a surveillance function for society.

Four other images of the media were also evaluated as a part of this project but are not reported on in this paper:

* The "Guide Dog" analogy subsumes the opinion leadership, mobilization, and general guidance functions of the media.

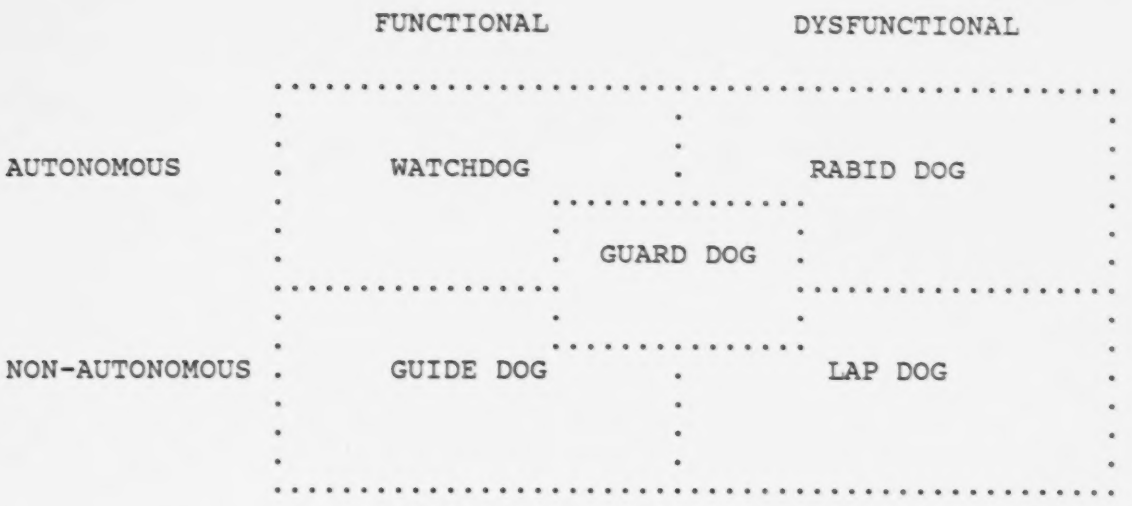
* A frequently echoed "popular" perception is that the press is a "Rabid Dog," eagerly massacring accessible victims in pursuit of profit.

* In its ideal form, the "Lap Dog" perspective is an "instrumentalist" approach which conceives of the media as being either under the direct control of government or as being easily manipulated by the dominant social class.

* The "Guard Dog" analogy proposed by Donohue, Olien and Tichenor (1987) incorporates ideas from each of the other analogies by noting that while the media may attack individuals who abuse government power, they ultimately support and maintain the underlying structures of the capitalist system.

These five stereotyped images of the media can be roughly located on the following typology:

TYPOLOGY OF MEDIA ANALOGIES



RELATED RESEARCH

Variations between individuals' perceptions are reflective of more than just personal idiosyncracies. The perceptions of individuals are potentially conditioned by the social environment in which they live, their social position, and their political orientations. Community Structure.

The community structure, often represented by the labels "rural vs. urban," "simple vs. complex," "homogeneous vs. heterogeneous," or "monolithic vs. pluralistic," refers to an aggregation of several structural properties. One characteristic of a complex community structure is a large, urbanized population. The population tends to be relatively diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic stratification. Complex systems have highly specialized divisions of labor and providing a greater variety of services to

their residents. Power tends to be more horizontally distributed and there are more groups with conflicting interests competing for power. Finally, as systems become more complex, there is growth in the number and strength of extra-local ties or in Warren's (1983) words, "vertical integration."

One of the most comprehensive analyses of the relationship between the structure of communities and the role of the mass media has been the research programme of George Donohue, Clarice Olien and Phillip Tichenor. Their research has examined the effect of community structure on the attitudes of the general public and newspaper editors, as well as on media content. They have developed a structural model for mass communication research (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1973) proposing that community structure is an important determinant of a wide variety of media-related phenomena.

The fact the power structure is narrow and there are fewer competing interests socializes members of homogeneous communities to a greater degree of value consensus. Conflict tends to be relatively subdued in homogeneous communities. By contrast, social conflict is a much common, institutionalized aspect of heterogeneous communities (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1980).

In terms of the community structure's impact on public perceptions of the role of the media, it has been hypothesized that because conflict was a more accepted characteristic of urban as opposed to rural environments, there would be more support for a press which seeks to expose community conflicts in urbanized areas. But, contrary to their expectations, Olien, Donohue and

Tichenor (1985) found that popular support for the watchdog role of the press was higher in low pluralism areas than in high pluralism areas. The authors note that it is possible that normative support for the watchdog may still be higher in the high pluralism areas, but that there is a greater recognition that the media fall short of this ideal in practice.

A study by Griswold (1987) yielded evidence that there is greater normative support for the watchdog in urban areas. Respondents in small towns were more likely than large-town or suburban respondents to agree that the media should be less critical of business. But, respondents in all areas supported the idea that the media should be a "watchdog" against government corruption and community problems.

Socioeconomic status.

Whereas community structure, as a variable, looks at structural differences between communities, it is also important to consider stratification variables which describe structural differences between individuals within communities. One of the most frequently used concepts regarding structural differences between individuals is socioeconomic status (SES). Two common components of SES are education and income.

Several studies have examined the effects of SES variables on public perceptions of the media. Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor (1985) found that the more education that individuals have, the less support they showed for the watchdog role. This does not necessarily mean that highly-educated people do not support the watchdog in a normative sense. The authors interpret these

findings as reflecting high education respondents' dissatisfaction with the performance of the media.

Griswold (1988) found that education was negatively associated with public support for the "Watchdog." In addition, an interaction was found between pluralism and education in that the difference accounted for by education was greater in the low pluralism areas. Griswold explains the lack of support for the "Watchdog" among high education respondents very differently from Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1985). High education respondents were said to be less supportive of the "Watchdog" because they are more at risk of being attacked by the press, whereas the Olien, Donohue and Tichenor study attributes it to the increased skepticism of high education groups.

In another study, Griswold (1987) found evidence supporting both interpretations. Support for his interpretation was provided by the observation that leaders in small communities were less likely than the general public to agree with the statement that the media <u>should</u> do more investigative reporting. This supports Griswold's (1988) contention that high SES groups have more to lose from a "watchdog" press and are thus less supportive of investigative reporting. On the other hand, Griswold (1987) showed that leaders were less likely than the general public to say that the media should reduce business criticism even though many of these leaders were from the business sector. This finding seems to be more supportive of Olien, Donohue and Tichenor's (1985) conclusion that high SES

respondents have a higher normative regard for the "watchdog" and are more critical in practice.

Gaziano and McGrath (1985) found that there are two types of individuals who are especially critical of the news media. They labelled these groups the "sophisticated skeptics" and the "less well informed and suspicious." The former group is basically a high SES group. Individuals in this category were more likely to view the media as biased in favor of wealthy business elites. Members of this group questioned media objectivity, but were very much in favor of investigative reporting. These two findings seem to support the interpretations of Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1985) as opposed to that of Griswold's (1988). The second group, the "less well informed and suspicious," are a low SES group. The respondents in this group rated media credibility as being very low, and tended to trust television more than newspapers. Like the "sophisticated skeptics," people in this group were more likely to perceive the media as being manipulated by powerful groups. At the same time, this group placed relatively strong faith in media objectivity.

Amor, McLeod and Kosicki (1987) factor analyzed respondents' images of the media. They found five image factors: news information quality, patterning of news, negative aspects of content, the nature of dependency and control of news, and the media's relationship to special interests. The authors found that highly-educated people were the most critical of the quality of news information. They were also most likely to feel that news reveals patterns or meanings in social issues. Education

was negatively associated with seeing the media as representing special interests, including the interests of the media themselves. Education was not related to negatives aspects of content such as bias, sensationalism and "negative" news. There was no relationship between education and whether respondents felt people were too dependent on the media. The only factor that income predicted significantly was special interests. Middle-income respondents were more likely to see the media as representing special interests than were low and high-income groups.

Becker, Cobbey and Sobowale (1978) examined public criticism of media coverage of the Watergate scandal. The authors concluded that SES variables were not very important in explaining respondents' evaluations of the media. Another study found no strong differences for income and education in terms of respondents' attitudes toward the desirability of media fairness (Immerwahr and Doble 1982).

Smith (1984a) reported that high-income respondents were more likely to say that broadcast media portrayed their community positively than low-income residents. No income differences were found for print media portrayals. In a subsequent study, Smith (1984b) found no income differences between the perceived influences of either newspapers or television on the community.

Political orientations.

Political orientations shape the way individuals perceive media bias. Conservatives tend to see the media as being liberal, while liberals see the media as being conservative.

Thus, it is expected that political orientations may affect how people conceive the role of the media.

The literature on political orientations as antecedents to public impressions of the media has produced contrasting findings. At least one study found little impact of political factors (Immerwahr and Doble, 1982), while other studies found strong effects (Amor, McLeod and Kosicki, 1987; and Becker, Cobbey and Sobowale, 1978).

In Immerwahr and Doble's (1982) study of public attitudes toward the media, neither political orientation nor party affiliation made a difference in terms of respondents' concerns for media fairness.

Amor, McLeod and Kosicki's (1987) found that political trust predicted high assessments of news quality as well as the belief in the ability of news coverage to uncover patterns and meanings. Political trust was negatively associated with the tendency to perceive negative aspects of content, media dependency, and dominance by special interests. Political efficacy was positively correlated with information quality and patterns in the news, but negatively correlated with the tendency to focus on negative aspects of content. Political partisanship was negatively associated with perceptions of the media as being representatives of special interests. Finally, the more politically interested the respondent, the greater the likelihood of seeing patterns in the news, judging style negatively, and viewing the media as independent of special interests.

In Becker, Cobbey and Sobowale's (1978) study on public reactions to media coverage of Watergate, political factors were found to be the strongest predictor of press criticism. Specifically, support for President Nixon, Republican party affiliation, and conservative political orientation were strongly associated with negative assessments of the conduct of the media. Two other political variables, confidence in leaders and satisfaction with the system, were also related to media criticism.

McLeod, Ward and Tancill (1965) focused specifically on the relationship between political alienation and media usage. They found that alienated respondents were significantly less interested in "non-sensational" media content. In addition, they were more likely to read newspapers for escapist reasons and less likely for informational purposes than the rest of the general public.

Alienation has not been a common variable in looking at media-related issues. However, another concept, community attachment, which is in some respects theoretically opposite to political alienation, has been used quite extensively in investigations of media use and public attitudes toward the media. While community attachment does not seem as inherently political as alienation, they represent opposites along the political dimension of "buying in" to the existing socio-political system. Several studies have shown that the more closely attached citizens are to the their community of residence, the more likely they are to read the local newspaper

(Stephens, 1978; Fortini-Campbell and Stamm, 1981; and Stamm and Fortini-Campbell, 1981).

Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1985) have elaborated on the attachment-readership relationship by noting that it varies with the structure of the community. Community attachment was a stronger factor in explaining newspaper use in urban and suburban as opposed to rural areas. However, Stephens (1985) found no differences between communities of different sizes in terms of newspaper usage and attitudes toward the newspaper.

HYPOTHESES

A. Normative Watchdog Expectations:

H_1: Respondents living in urban areas will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media than respondents in rural areas.

H_2: High education respondents will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" media role.

H_3: High income respondents will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media.

H_4: Politically-involved respondents will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media.

H_5: The more respondents deviate from the political center, the more they will be to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media.

B. Watchdog Performance Evaluations:

H_6: Respondents living in urban areas will rate the "watchdog performance of the media lower than respondents in rural areas.

H_7: High education respondents will rate the media's "watchdog" performance lower.

H_8: High income respondents will rate the media's "watchdog" performance lower.

H_9: Politically-involved respondents will rate the media's "watchdog" performance lower.

H_{10}: The more respondents deviate from the political center, the lower they will rate the media's "watchdog" performance.

Rationale for Hypotheses:

The theory of structural differentiation and the literature on its relationship to conceptualizations of the media predicts that people in relatively heterogeneous areas will be more likely to accept the normative role of the media as being a "watchdog" because individuals in these communities are more conditioned to accept conflict. By the same token, individuals in the urban areas, with their high expectations, may be more disappointed in the media's "watchdog" performance.

The relationship of the SES variables to the normative "Watchdog" expectations provides a test of the contrasting interpretations of Griswold (1988) and Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1985). Both studies found a negative relationship between education and support for the watchdog role of the media. Griswold concluded that this was because high SES groups have more to lose from a "Watchdog" media. On the other hand, Olien, Donohue and Tichenor attributed the negative relationship to high-education individual's dissatisfaction with the performance of the media. Thus, the conclusions of these two studies have different expectations for the relationship between education and the affinity for the "Watchdog" ideal. Griswold's interpretation would predict a negative relationship, whereas Olien, Donohue and Tichenor would predict a positive relationship.

The high SES individuals should be more disappointed by the media, in part because of their high normative concerns for the "watchdog" role and in part because their higher levels of education should also make them more critical in their evaluations of media performance.

Politically-involved respondents are likely to be the most concerned with political issues. The are also likely to be concerned about political corruption. Thus, they will see the "watchdog" role as being more important. But, they are also likely to be the most disappointed in the actual "watchdog" performance of the media.

Individuals who deviate from the center are likely to be more concerned that the media provide of diversity of ideas. They are thus likely to support the "watchdog" media. However, their high expectations are also more likely to be disappointed.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected with two telephone surveys conducted by the Mass Communication Research Center at the University of Wisconsin. The first survey, in the fall of 1986, sampled 567 residents of Dane County, Wisconsin. The second survey, in the fall of 1987, sampled 480 of these residents. The sample was drawn by randomly selecting telephone numbers from the Dane County telephone book. In order to retain unlisted phone numbers in the sample, a constant was added to the last digit of the numbers selected. The interviewing was done by graduate students and upper-level undergraduates as part of an advanced survey

methodology course at the University of Wisconsin. All interviews were checked by call-backs.

Dependent variables.

The items used as dependent variables were split into two types: 1) those which inquired about respondents' normative concerns about the role of the media, and 2) those which assessed respondents' evaluative judgments of the media's performance.

In the 1987 survey, the respondents were asked these questions in a normative mode. A list of potential functions of the media was preceded by the question: "How important do you think this function is?" These same items were asked in an evaluative mode on the 1986 survey. For the evaluative mode, the initial question was, "How well do you think the media serve this function?" Table One summarizes the dependent and independent variables scales.[1]

Independent variables.

The samples from Dane County are broken down by whether the respondent lives in Madison and its immediate suburbs or in the exterior parts of the county. The location of the respondent's residence was determined by the telephone prefix.

For education, the respondents were asked, "What was the highest year of education you completed?" The respondents in these samples were asked a series of questions to categorize their total household incomes. First, they were asked if their household income was greater than $10,000. If so, they were asked if their household income was greater than $20,000. This

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[1] See the Appendix for a list of all scale items.

process continued until the respondent either answered "no" or answered "yes" when asked if their household income was greater than $60,000. This created seven income categories.

TABLE ONE

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ANALYTICAL VARIABLES

	Year	Items	Alpha	Mean	S.D.
Dependent variables:					
Watchdog					
Evaluative scale	1986	5	.60	14.59	2.36
Normative scale	1987	4	.74	31.58	6.16
Independent variables:					
City Zone					
	1986	1	--	.72	.45
	1987	1	--	.73	.45
Education					
	1986	1	--	14.51	2.49
	1987	1	--	14.75	2.63
Income					
	1986	1	--	3.29	1.75
	1987	1	--	3.20	1.72
Political Involvement					
	1986	1	--	6.02	2.35
	1987	1	--	6.14	2.43
Political Deviation scale					
	1986	2	.65	2.51	1.60
	1987	2	.58	2.45	1.56
Political Alienation scale					
	1986	3	.47	7.63	1.97
	1987	3	.61	7.54	2.37
Political Conservatism scale					
	1986	2	.77	7.87	2.81
	1987	2	.68	7.91	2.68

N = 567 (1986)
480 (1987)

Political involvement was measured on a ten-point scale in response to the question, "How interested are you in politics?" A scale of political deviation was created using two items. One

item represented economic aspects of the liberal-conservative continuum and one item represented social aspects. Although there were no hypotheses based on "liberalism versus conservatism," the effect of this variable was checked because it was used to create the "political deviation" variable.[2] A scale measuring political alienation was constructed from five-point scale items assessing reactions to statements about politics.

The data analysis assesses the relationships between the independent variables and the normative and evaluative "watchdog" images using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis procedure. Hierarchical regression was used based on the logic of the theoretical relationships between the independent variables. The structure of a community is an important determinant of the SES and political orientations of the inhabitants of that community. Theoretically, the direction of causality is uni-directional. Thus, the community structure was entered as the first step of the regression analysis. The SES variables were entered together as the second block in the analysis. The socio-economic variables were assumed to contribute to rather than reflect a respondent's political orientations. Therefore, the political orientation variables

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[2] In order to convert "liberalism/conservatism" to "political deviation" from the center, the moderates were recoded to zeroes representing no deviation from the political center. The other categories were recoded based on their deviation from the moderate category. In the process, the "very liberal" respondents were lumped together with the "very conservative" respondents. This necessitated the examination of the "liberal/conservative" variable as mentioned above. The two social deviation items were then added together to form a deviance scale from zero to six.

were entered as the third block in the analysis. Age and gender were added as a fourth block.

RESULTS

Normative Watchdog Expectations.

Individuals who live in more urbanized areas are socialized to accept more conflict than those living in rural areas. Consequently, they were expected to be more likely to support the normative media watchdog role to root out conflictual situations.

H_1: Respondents living in urban areas will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media than respondents in rural areas.

This hypothesis was supported by the significant bivariate correlation between city zone and the "Normative Watchdog" scale (expressed as the MultR of .126 in Table Two). However, while the "community structure" block was significant when entered into the equation, the final Beta (.055) was not significant.

The variables entered in the second block, education and income, are used to adjudicate between the competing explanations offered by Olien, Donohue and Tichenor (1985) and Griswold (1988) concerning the negative relationship between SES and the acceptance of the "watchdog" role for the media. The former study suggested that high SES groups had more to lose from the "watchdog" media. The latter study argued that the negative relationship is attributable to the greater disillusionment of the high SES groups with the performance of the media. The implication of the second interpretation is that education leads to more critical analyses of the media.

TABLE TWO

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION: THE NORMATIVE WATCHDOG SCALE -- 1987

Variable	Step	MultR	Inc.R^2	SigF	Beta	Sig.B
Block 1:		.126	.016	.006		
City	1				.055	.224
Block 2:		.163	.011	.074		
Income	1				.076	.087
Education	2				.010	.829
Block 3:		.356	.100	.000		
Deviation	1				-.028	.511
Conservatism	2				-.133	.003
Alienation	3				-.056	.211
Involvement	4				.281	.000
BLOCK 4:		.391	.026	.001		
Female	1				.146	.001
Age	2				.048	.290
TOTAL		.391	.153	.000		

N = 480

Parallel hypotheses were made for the two SES variables:

H_2: High education respondents will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" media role.

H_3: High income respondents will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media.

Table Two shows that the two SES variables do not account for a significant proportion of the variance when entered as the second block of variables. Both SES variables had positive betas, but neither were significant.

Variations in political orientations were expected to be associated with normative perceptions of the media's "watchdog"

role. An important component of the media's watchdog role is providing a forum for the marketplace of ideas. Political involvement should be related to the extent to which one believes that media should vigorously cover political issues. In addition, the further one is from the political center, the greater the threat posed by a lack of diversity in the information marketplace. Thus, the following two hypotheses were tested:

H_4: Politically-involved respondents will be more likely to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media.

H_5: The more respondents deviate from the political center, the more they will be to advocate a "normative watchdog" role for the media.

Hypothesis Four was indeed supported by the findings (Table Two). The beta for political involvement, .281, was significant at the .05 level. The beta for political deviation (-.028) indicates that Hypothesis Five was not supported. A respondent's degree of involvement in politics was positively associated with normative support for the watchdog press, but distance from the political center was not.

The contribution of each of the three blocks was found to be significant. While the community structure contributed 1.59% of the variance and the SES variables 1.07%, the largest proportion of the variance explained came from the political orientation variables (10.03%). The two largest contributors in the political orientations block were political conservatism, which was negatively related to normative "watchdog" expectations, and political involvement, which was positively related.

Watchdog Performance Evaluations:

In terms of respondents' evaluations of the media's watchdog performance, the hypotheses were based on the logic that those respondents who had higher expectations for the media would exhibit greater dissatisfaction with performance. For community structure:

> H_6: Respondents living in urban areas will rate the "watchdog performance of the media lower than respondents in rural areas.

The negative relationship between city zone and the "Evaluative Watchdog" scale was not significant (Table Three). City dwellers, who had somewhat higher expectations of the media as a watchdog, were not less satisfied with the media's performance of this role.

TABLE THREE

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION: THE EVALUATIVE WATCHDOG SCALE -- 1986

Variable	Step	MultR	Inc.R^2	SigF	Beta	Sig.B
Block 1:		.009	.000	.830		
City	1				-.026	.537
Block 2:		.139	.019	.004		
Income	1				.018	.667
Education	2				.071	.126
Block 3:		.293	.067	.000		
Deviation	1				-.098	.019
Conservatism	2				-.003	.942
Alienation	3				-.233	.000
Involvement	4				.056	.220
BLOCK 4:		.294	.001	.820		
Female	1				-.026	.529
Age	2				.004	.921
TOTAL		.294	.086	.000		
N = 567						

In terms of the relationship between the SES variables and the "Evaluative Watchdog," it was hypothesized that:

H_7: High education respondents will rate the media's "watchdog" performance lower.

H_8: High income respondents will rate the media's "watchdog" performance lower.

Both of these hypotheses were not supported. In fact, the direction of the relationship between both education and income to the "Evaluative Watchdog" scale were positive (Table Three). While neither of the betas were significant individually, the SES block as a whole accounted for a significant proportion of the variance.

It was also hypothesized that those respondents who were more politically involved and those who were further from the political center would be more disappointed with the media's actual performance of its watchdog role:

H_9: Politically-involved respondents will rate the media's "watchdog" performance lower.

H_{10}: The more respondents deviate from the political center, the lower they will rate the media's "watchdog" performance.

The relationship between political involvement and watchdog evaluations was not significant (Table Three). Political deviation, on the other hand, was significantly negatively related with the "Evaluative Watchdog" scale.

Both the SES variables and the political orientation variables explained a significant proportion of the variance in the "Evaluative Watchdog" scale (Table Three). Again, the political orientation variables again contributed to the largest proportion of the variance in the dependent variable (6.65%). In

this case, the political alienation variable was the most important. The respondents who were most pessimistic about the political system were the most pessimistic about the media's performance of the "watchdog" role. Overall, the independent variables in this analysis explained 8.57% of the variance in the dependent variable.

DISCUSSION

Community structure was related to normative expectations of the media as a watchdog, but not related to evaluations of the media's performance of this role. The relationship between community structure and normative emphasis on the watchdog role of the media is consistent with a body of literature which suggests that high pluralism areas provide a more receptive milieu for social conflict than rural areas. This relationship might have proven to be an even greater predictor of the "normative Watchdog" scale had there been more variation within the independent variable. The difference between Madison and rural parts of Dane County is not as striking a contrast between high and low pluralism as would be desired.

Part of this investigation was framed as a test between Olien, Donohue and Tichenor's elite disillusionment (1985) and Griswold's elite apprehension explanation (1988) explanation of the negative relationship between SES and the "watchdog" view of the media. This comparison was operationalized by making a distinction between the normative and evaluative images of the media as a "watchdog."

The fact that the relationships between the SES variables and normative Watchdog expectations seems to support the interpretation by Olien, Donohue and Tichenor which argued that education leads one to place more importance on having an aggressive watchdog media. However, contrary to the findings of these two previous studies, this survey of Dane County residents failed to find a negative relationship between either education or household income and evaluations of the media's watchdog performance. The high SES respondents were not more pessimistic of the media's "watchdog" performance. SES was associated with both normative expectations and performance evaluations of the media.

The evidence from studies by Gaziano and McGrath (1985) and Whitney (1984) suggests that the relationship between SES and evaluations of the media's watchdog performance might be curvilinear. In these two studies, negative attitudes toward the role of the media were found in both the low-status and the high-status groups.

In order to examine the possibility that the relationship between education and the "Evaluative Watchdog" scale might be curvilinear, the respondents were categorized into four levels of education. The four levels were: high school education and below (29.4%); some college (29.7%); four years of college (25.4%); and more than four years of college (15.5%). The means of these four groups (Table Four) show some evidence of the curvilinear relationship found by Gaziano and McGrath (1985) and Whitney (1984). Those respondents who had more than four years of

college education were less positive in their evaluations of the media's watchdog performance (14.67) than were the respondents with four years of college (15.10). However, a T-test between these two group means showed that this difference was not significant at the .05 level. An analysis of variance revealed that the linearity of the relationship between education and the "Evaluative Watchdog" scale was significant (F=7.71, d.f.=1. p.=.01). The deviation from linearity was not significant at the .05 level (F=2.60, d.f.=2, p.=.08). Although the highly educated respondents appeared to be somewhat more critical of the media, the distinct curvilinear relationship described by Gaziano and McGrath, and Whitney was not found in this data.

TABLE FOUR

MEANS FOR THE FOUR LEVELS OF EDUCATION ON THE NORMATIVE WATCHDOG SCALE -- 1987

Level of Education	Eval. Watchdog Mean	S.D.	Cases
High school and below	14.17	2.19	165
Some college	14.43	2.32	167
Four years of college	15.10	2.40	143
+ four years of college	14.67	2.49	87
TOTAL	14.56	2.35	562

Numerous studies have concluded that the media support the interests of elite groups in society (e.g., Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre, 1971; Molotch and Lester, 1975; and Gitlin, 1981). The reason SES was associated with the positive evaluations of the

media may be because in practice, the media's "watchdog" behavior does not threaten the status quo of the existing social structure. In other words, high SES was not associated with criticism of the watchdog media because the performance of the media more closely resembles a "Guard Dog" (Donohue, Olien and Tichenor, 1987) which protects the interests of the social elite.

Respondents' images of the mass media as a watchdog seem to be linked to their larger political orientations. Normative watchdog expectations were positively associated with both political involvement and negatively associated with political conservatism. These variables were not significantly related to evaluations of the media's watchdog performance. However, the extent to which respondents differ from the political center was associated with skepticism of the media's watchdog performance. Alienation was also associated with negative watchdog evaluations. In other words, belief in the importance of an oppositional media is stronger for political involved and liberal respondents, while criticism of the media's failure to perform this role is related to an individual's perceived distance from the mainstream of American politics.

CONCLUSIONS

There were several significant relationships between individual independent variables and the dependent variables. Community structure ence was significantly related to the "Normative Watchdog" scale. The urban respondents were more

likely to assign a watchdog role for the media, but not more disappointed in its performance.

Socioeconomic status variables were related to positive evaluations of the media's "Watchdog" performance. This finding was directly opposite to the hypothesis which expected educated respondents to be more critical of the media. In addition, political orientations of respondents were strongly associated with the "Watchdog" prescriptions and evaluations.

A similar pattern occurred for several of the independent variables. The community structure, SES and political involvement variables, which are correlated with each other, were associated with "Watchdog" expectations of the media as predicted. But contrary to the hypothesized relationships, they were not associated with negative evaluations of the media's performance. The normative and evaluative watchdog images of the media seem to be related. In other words, expectations and assessments go together. In the case of the "Watchdog" media, both expectations and assessments seem to be positively associated with individuals connections to the polistical power structure. It may be that these urban, high SES, politically-involved people are more likely to have their interests articulated by the media and are thus less critical in abstract terms.

On issues like media credibility and degree of news processing (Amor, McLeod and Kosicki, 1987; McLeod, Kosicki, Amor, Allen and Philps, 1986; Gaziano and McGrath, 1985), the high SES groups have been found to be more critical of the media.

But when they are asked in a more general way about the media and its relationship to the larger system, they are more supportive of the media. In other words, privileged respondents buy into the system as a whole to a greater degree. The high SES respondents may be more critical of certain specific aspects of the media's performance; but, when it comes to the bottom line, they are more positive toward the system, including the role played by the media.

APPENDIX A

The items considered for the "Watchdog" scale were (the type of scales used to measure individual item responses are in parentheses):[3]

1. The news media provide a service essential to democracy...
   -1986 EVALUATIVE (five-point scale)
   mean = 4.01 s.d. = .81

2. The media give people a daily account of what's happening in the world...
   -1986 EVALUATIVE (four-point scale)
   mean = 2.86 s.d. = .66
   -1987 NORMATIVE (ten-point scale)
   mean = 8.60 s.d. = 1.67

3. The media inform people so they can vote intelligently...
   -1986 EVALUATIVE (four-point scale)
   mean = 2.57 s.d. = .73
   -1987 NORMATIVE (ten-point scale)
   mean = 8.01 s.d. = 2.14

4. The media provide a forum for a wide range of viewpoints on important issues...
   -1986 EVALUATIVE (four-point scale)
   mean = 2.52 s.d. = .78
   -1987 NORMATIVE (ten-point scale)
   mean = 7.06 s.d. = 2.05

5. The media serve as a watchdog on government and politicians...
   -1986 EVALUATIVE (four-point scale)
   mean = 2.60 s.d. = .82
   -1987 NORMATIVE (ten-point scale)
   mean = 7.21 s.d. = 2.32

[3] Note: For the construction of all scales, any missing data was recoded to the mean. However, the standard deviations in this chapter are reported prior to any recoding of missing data. The average number of cases with missing data was 3.6 per dependent variable for the general public surveys.

APPENDIX B

INTERCORRELATIONS OF THE EVALUATIVE WATCHDOG SCALE ITEMS: 1986

	I.	II.	III.	IV.
I. News media are essential to democracy				
II. Media give daily account of world	.094			
III. Media inform citizens about politics	.093	.440		
IV. Media provide forum for wide range of views	.056	.350	.302	
V. Media serve as watchdog on government	.137	.311	.302	.298

N = 567 (1986)

APPENDIX C

INTERCORRELATIONS OF THE NORMATIVE WATCHDOG SCALE ITEMS: 1987

	I.	II.	III.
I. Media give daily account of world			
II. Media inform citizens about politics	.493		
III. Media provide forum for wide range of views	.387	.576	
IV. Media serve as watchdog on government	.317	.319	.431

N = 480 (1987)

APPENDIX D

INTERCORRELATIONS OF THE POLITICAL ALIENATION VARIABLE

	I.	II.
I. Every vote counts in an election		
1986		
1987		
II. Government is run big interests		
1986	.18	
1987	.25	
III. Votes hardly make any differences		
1986	.26	.24
1987	.30	.58

N = 567 (1986)
480 (1987)

APPENDIX E

INTERCORRELATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.
I. City Zone					
1986					
1987					
II. Education					
1986	.208				
1987	.258				
III. Income					
1986	-.041	.266			
1987	-.056	.176			
IV. Pol. Involvement					
1986	.073	.322	.169		
1987	.198	.236	.114		
V. Pol. Deviation					
1986	.025	.075	-.030	.209	
1987	.064	.057	.028	.113	
VI. Pol. Alienation					
1986	-.000	-.163	-.161	-.234	-.025
1987	-.144	-.204	-.118	-.148	.016

N = 567 (1986)
480 (1987)

APPENDIX F

ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS

	Normative Watchdog 1987	Evaluative Watchdog 1986
City Zone	.126	-.009
Income	.082	.088
Education	.099	.122
Deviation	.008	-.075
Conservatism	-.158	-.010
Alienation	-.106	-.260
Involvement	.313	.117
Female	.131	-.059
Age	.097	.012
N =	480	567

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